

BEFORE THE
POSTAL RATE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, DC 20268

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In the Matter of:

Balm, Florida 33503
Post Office State ZIP Code

POSTAL REGULATORY
COMMISSIONDocket No: A2012-4Postal Regulatory Commission
Office of the Chief Admin. Officer

George and Marilyn Fears, Petitioner(s)

NOV 7 2011

PARTICIPANT STATEMENT

1. Petitioner(s) are appealing the Postal Service's Final Determination concerning the Balm post office. The Final Determination was posted August 29, 2011 (date)

2. In accordance with applicable law, 39 U.S.C. § 404(d)(5), the Petitioner(s) request the Postal Regulatory Commission to review the Postal Service's determination on the basis of the record before the Postal Service in the making of the determination.

3. Petitioners: Please set out below the reasons why you believe the Postal Service's Final Determination should be reversed and returned to the Postal Service for further consideration. (See pages of the Instructions for an outline of the kinds of reasons the law requires us to consider.) Please be as specific as possible. Please continue on additional paper if you need more space and attach the additional page(s) to this form.

We strongly appeal the closing of the Balm Post Office. It has been a landmark in our community for over a century; and even to this day, we have been provided superior service since moving to Balm 26 years ago. (See Example A for Newspaper article describing the Post Office)

A Final Determination document to consolidate the Balm Post Office with the Wimauma Post Office had included the distances between the two. It was mentioned they are five miles apart, which is accurate; however, from our residence, it is approximately eight miles from the Wimauma Post Office. Considering eight miles, please note the troublesome one-way commute to pick-up our mail, purchase stamps, and mail packages at the Wimauma Post Office.

According to the Proposal Checklist, Section IV (Economic Savings), two documents which reflect different dates show inconsistencies in the dollar amounts for Salary, Benefits, etc... [Example B]. To properly analyze a budgeted savings, Revenue should exist as part of the equation, which it does not. According to the Proposal to consolidate the Balm, FL Post Office and continue to provide a Independent Post Office (Docket # 1353954), the Revenue for 2010 was stated at \$53,012 [Example C]. The current Postmasters salary cannot be a savings to the Balm Post Office because the Postmaster will be transferred to another U.S.P.S. facility; so, the only "savings" to U.S.P.S. is the annual lease payments of \$8,400. If the Balm Post Office's clientele merged with the Wimauma Post Office, additional staff will be needed to accommodate all customers; or, if additional staff is not necessary, as a recommendation, if Balm Post Office were to have a Postal clerk rather than a Postmaster, this plan of action would alleviate any current losses.

Five years ago, our community had the opportunity to have mail delivered to their homes. If you elected to do so, you would place a mailbox in your driveway and your city would be classified as Wimauma. Those who did not participate would still be classified as Balm. As you can predict, the community was mixed with Balm and Wimauma zip codes on the same street; this has also created mayhem when receiving packages through UPS or FEDEX. UPS and FEDEX had informed us that Balm doesn't exist, but the driver's were still delivering mail with the city name of Balm because they were already familiar with their everyday route. If we were expecting mail through U.S.P.S., even though the

city name reflected Balm, the package would be sent to the Wimauma Post Office. Either the package would be delivered back to the sender, or the package would be lost. We tried to create a relationship with Nancy, the Wimauma Post Master, to hold our packages; however, she has been non-cooperative and returns our mail to the sender. (See Example D)

On April 13, 2011, four Representatives from the Postal Service came to attend the meeting at the Balm Post Office parking lot at 10:30 a.m., where 53 residents attended. An Interpreter was needed as some of the residents were Hispanic, but one was not provided. There were unanswered questions, so we provided our email and phone number to two of the Representatives, who were speakers. When we did not receive answers from our queries, we called and were informed the two Representatives "no longer worked in that Department." The gentleman on the phone would have another individual contact us; we did receive the follow up call, but to no avail, they were unable to comment because they were not at the meeting.

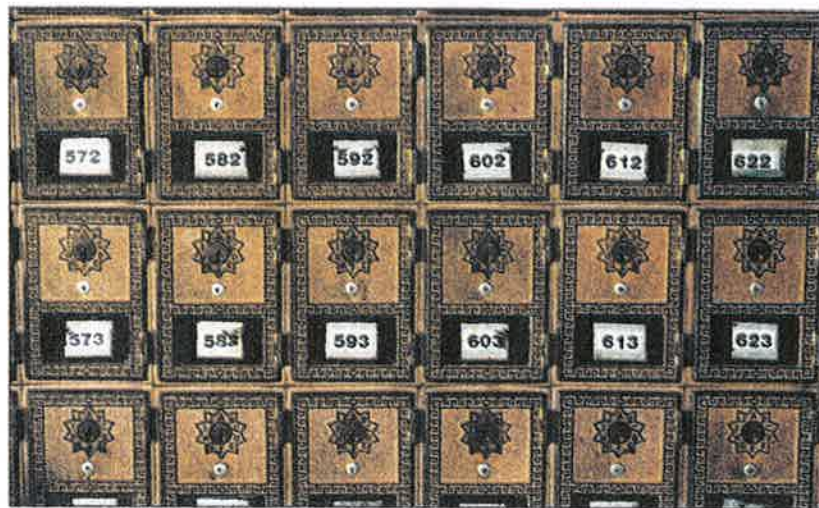
It was mentioned at one of hearings that the Balm Post Office averages only 36 transactions daily (accounting for only 43 minutes of retail). That figure may be true, but is misleading. Most of the new Balm residents have mailboxes in their driveways, which is linked to Wimauma.

We have filled out all questionnaires and attended all meetings regarding the Balm Post Office closing; we took a great interest in attending the meeting that had District Director, Blaine Gravitt, as a Spokesperson for Congressman Dennis Ross. Many suggestions were made, but again no more communication or follow up beyond the meetings.

Please consider what actions can take place to save our landmark. It is very important that it remains an active site in Balm.

REMEMBER WHEN THE POSTMASTER KNEW YOU?

He still does, at the Balm mail depot. Guy, the fourth postmaster here in 100 years, doles out stamps, smiles and conversation.



The post office boxes are from the 1930s but have been updated to use keys instead of a combination lock.

By HELEN ANNE TRAVIS
Times Staff Writer

Rock trucks rumble down the county roads that take you to the post office. They pass streets with names like Patsy Marie Lane and Sweet Charlie Circle.

In the front of the gray building, a rooster calls. A black and white cat with golden eyes sneaks past a lone blue collection box outside.

Inside this post office, there's no machine that weighs your envelopes and spits out the right postage. You can't swipe your credit card and have a book of stamps slip out of a metal slot.

If you want to mail a box or buy postage, you have to talk to Guy.

Guy Bennett, 51, is the fourth postmaster in the 100-year history of the Balm post office.

"Working here is like stepping back in time 45 years," said Bennett, who took the job in 1993 after working as an engineer for the Postal Service. "I know everyone who walks in that door by their first and last name."

Harold Gattshall, 84, drives 30 miles from

BALM

his home in Temple Terrace to the Balm post office. He calls Bennett and asks if his Social Security and pension checks have arrived before making the trek.

"You get good service here," Gattshall said.

He shares his opinions about politics, economics and development with Bennett.

Balm was Gattshall's home for 16 years. He has no intention of using the post office in Temple Terrace. The lines are too long, the workers too impersonal.

"These people, they're not only my customers, but my friends, too," Bennett said.

He knows what churches they attend, their hobbies and their line of business.

He also knows their secrets.

"Guy's information central," said Dan Sumner, 61, a firearms training instructor who visits Bennett and the post office every day, except Sundays. "He pretty much has his finger on what's going on in Balm."

Bennett hears the hushed whispers of land deals and divorces.

He helps the secretive husband and wife set up separate post office boxes.

Bennett doesn't ask, nor does he tell.

"I know some doozies," he said, "but I can't

Please see **POSTAL** Page 8

repeat them."

He can share some of his gems with Pooka. Elizabeth "Pooka" Sweat, 87, comes by every day and greets Bennett's customers. She knows many from her 33-year stint as Balm's second postmaster.

"I was never a postmistress," she said. "The post office doesn't pay enough for a mistress."

She leans against the wood-paneled post office wall and closes her eyes, recalling the days when the mail came by train and the customers rode in on horses.

"When I was here, they didn't have these fancy machines," she said.

She watches Bennett read a customer's change off a green and black computer screen. The fancy machine — a 1982 DOS system — takes up most of the space on the front desk.

Next to Pooka, a bulletin board advertises a church youth group and inquires about the whereabouts of a lost puppy.

Life moves at a different pace here.

Bennett's transition from the high-energy Postal Service construction department to the Balm post office was difficult at first.

"My mind wasn't going 90 mph," he said. "I was bored."

Other postmasters told him to slow down and enjoy his new pace.

"And I did," he said.

He decided to do special things for his customers. Though post office boxes are supposed to be assigned randomly, Bennett bends the rules. He assigns elderly patrons boxes at a comfortable level so they don't have to bend down. Younger customers, with their flexible knees, are assigned the lower boxes. When people are too ill to get their mail, Bennett will stop by their homes on his way to Athletic Clubs of America, his gym in Brandon.

Bennett also accommodates his Spanish-speaking customers. Each day, 20 to 25 people come in who can manage only broken English. He knows a little bit of Spanish. Sometimes, if he and a customer can't communicate, he can tell by what they have in their hands what they need from him.

Shipments of chickens, too big for the 1930s brass boxes that line the post office's walls, have sat in his office. They filled the room



Times photo — SKIP O'ROURKE

Elizabeth "Pooka" Sweat, 87, was the second postmaster at the Balm post office, for 33 years. Now she greets post office patrons as they fetch their mail in the mornings. She has a business next door and, in fact, owns the post office building.

with smells and chirps while they waited for their owners to arrive.

■ ■ ■

Bennett arrives at work early. He doesn't find his 20-minute commute from south Valrico tedious.

"When you're on the road at 5 a.m., there aren't many people," he said.

The post office officially opens at 9 a.m., but Bennett accommodates farmers, the bulk of his customers, who like to pick up their mail around 8.

Sorting the mail into the brass boxes takes Bennett two to three hours in the morning. It's a ritual he enjoys.

"Every time I touch a piece of mail for a customer," Bennett said, "their face pops into my mind."

From the west, development creeps toward Balm. Signs promising "Mansion Homes" speckle the flat farm fields. Housing developments are popping up, ousting the trees and wildlife.

"The people that moved down here and

bought their 5 acres, thinking it was paradise, they don't want that," Bennett said.

Bennett doesn't think his unique haven in the Balm post office will be affected by the intruding city.

At worst, a part-time worker may come in and help if the development yields too much work.

"It would take an act of Congress to close this office," he said.

Helen Anne Travis can be reached at 661-2439 or at htravis@sptimes.com.



Times photos — SKIP O'ROURKE

Balm postmaster Guy Bennett, left, visits with Earl Grizzle, who came in to buy stamps. Going into the post office is like stepping back in time. "These people, they're not only my customers, but my friends, too," Bennett says. And when he touches a piece of mail, "their face pops into my mind."

Section III Effect on Employees

- X Paragraph explaining about postmaster vacancy/OIC/other career and noncareer employees of the office. If a postmaster or other employees are reassigned this must be explained and tell whether the reassignments are voluntary.

**Section IV Economic Savings**

A statement of annual savings includes a breakdown as follows:

Postmaster salary (EAS-13, Minimum, no COLA) \$

36,381

Fringe benefits 33.5% \$

12,187

Rental costs, excluding utilities \$

8,400

Total annual costs \$

56,968

Less estimated cost of replacement service -

0

Total annual savings \$

56,968

- X A one-time expense of \$ 1,000 will be/was incurred for installation of CBUs and parcel lockers.

1,000

- Y Is postmaster salary based on the minimum salary without COLA?

- N Does postmaster salary reflect the current office evaluation?

WCS-11

Section V Other Factors

- X The Postal Service has identified no other factors for consideration (if appropriate).

- N/A List other factors as appropriate.

- N/A Other factors when replacement service is a CPO.

Section VI Summary

- X The proposal must include a brief summary that explains why the closing or consolidation is necessary and an assessment of how those factors supporting the need for change outweigh any negative factors. In taking competing considerations into account, the need to provide a maximum degree of effective and regular service must be paramount.

Section VII Notices

- X Appropriate notice is made that this is a proposal and not a final determination. If a final determination is made to discontinue the office, information on the appeal process will be provided at that time.

Checklist Completed By: Tracey Duran date: 10/7/2011

Investigative Coordinator Cindy LeCompte

Reviewed and Certified By: Tracey Duran date: 10/7/2011

District PO Review Coordinator Cindy LeCompte

III. EFFECT ON EMPLOYEES

The postmaster position became vacant when the postmaster was promoted on June 05, 2010. The noncareer postmaster relief (PMR) may be separated from the Postal Service. No other Postal Service employee will be adversely affected. Since the postmaster vacancy an OIC has been installed to operate the office.

*

IV. ECONOMIC SAVINGS

The Postal Service estimates an annual savings of \$ 84,241 with a breakdown as follows:

Postmaster Salary (EAS-13, No COLA)	\$ 56,810
Fringe Benefits @ 33.5%	\$ 19,031
Annual Lease Costs	+ \$ 8,400
Total Annual Costs	\$ 84,241
Less Annual Cost of Replacement Service	- \$ 0
Total Annual Savings	\$ 84,241

V. OTHER FACTORS

The Postal Service has identified no other factors for consideration.

VI. SUMMARY

The Postal Service is proposing to consolidate the Balm, FL Post Office and provide delivery and retail services by a independent post office under the administrative responsibility of the Wimauma Post Office, located five miles away.

The postmaster was promoted on June 05, 2010. If the office has a noncareer PMR(s), they may be separated from the Postal Service; however, attempts will be made to reassign the employee(s) to a nearby facility. No other employee(s) will be adversely affected. Post office workload has declined. Effective and regular service will continue to be provided by independent post office.

The Balm Post Office provided delivery and retail service to 261 PO Box or general delivery customers and no delivery route customers. The daily retail window transactions averaged 36. There are two permit mailers or postage meter customers.

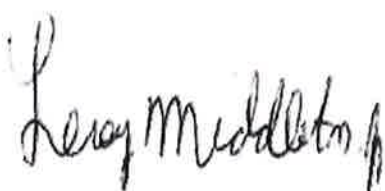
A classified branch will continue to provide the same services as an independent post office, except for permit mailings and meter settings. There will be a loss of the postmaster position. However, the branch will be operated by career postal employees. To help preserve community identity, the community name and ZIP Code will be retained in the mailing address. Customers will experience no change in address. The Postal Service will save an estimated \$84,241 annually. The branch will be administered and supervised by the Postal Service to ensure that high standards of service are maintained.

Taking all available information into consideration, the Postal Service has determined that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages and this proposal is warranted.

VII. NOTICES

- A. Support Materials. Copies of all materials upon which this proposal is based are available for public inspection at the Balm Post Office and Wimauma Post Office during normal office hours.
- B. This is a proposal. It is not a final determination to consolidate this post office. If a final determination is made to consolidate this post office, after public comments on this proposal are received and taken into account, a notice of that final determination will be posted in this office.

The final determination will contain instructions on how affected customers may appeal that decision to the Postal Regulatory Commission. Any such appeal must be received by the commission within 30 days of the posting of the final determination.



LEROY MIDDLETON
Manager, Post Office Operations

05/05/2011
Date

I. RESPONSIVENESS TO COMMUNITY POSTAL NEEDS

The Postal Service is issuing the final determination to consolidate the Balm, FL Post Office and provide delivery and retail services by a independent post office under the administrative responsibility of the Wimauma Post Office, located five miles away.

A classified branch is operated by career postal employees and provides the same services as an independent post office, except for postage meter setting and acceptance of permit mail.

The postmaster position became vacant when the postmaster was promoted on June 05, 2010. Since the postmaster vacancy an OIC has been installed to operate the office. Postmaster level and office service hours are determined by a workload analysis which includes the number of deliveries and revenue.

The office was studied for possible closing or consolidation due to the following reasons: Office is currently vacant. There is an office (Wimauma) approximately 5.4 miles of the Balm office that can easily accomodate the retail and box section.

The Balm Post Office, an EAS-13 level, provides service from 08:00 - 12:30 - 13:00 - 15:00 Monday - Friday , Closed Saturday and lobby hours of 24 hrs on Monday - Friday and 24 hrs on Saturday to 261 post office box or general delivery customers and no delivery customers. Retail services included the sale of stamps, stamped paper, and money orders; special services such as Registered Mail, Certified Mail, Insured Mail, COD Mail, and Express Mail services; and the acceptance and dispatch of all classes of mail.

The retail window averaged 36 transaction(s) accounting for 43 minute(s) of retail workload daily. With minimal workload, the Postal Service feels that effective and regular service will be provided by independent post office. Office receipts for the last 3 years were: \$59,177 (154 revenue units) in FY 2008; \$56,819 (148 revenue units) in FY 2009; and \$53,012 (138 revenue units) in FY 2010. There were two permit mailer(s) or postage meter customer(s).

The classified branch will provide much of the same services as a post office, except for permit mail acceptance and postage meter settings. Retail service is also available at the Wimauma Post Office, an EAS- level office located 5.4 miles away. Window service hours are from 09:00 - 16:00, Monday through Friday, and Closed on Saturday. There are 629 post office boxes available.

On April 13, 2011, representatives from the Postal Service were available at Balm Post Office to answer questions and provide information to customers. 53 customer(s) attended the meeting.

On April 03, 2011, 195 questionnaires were distributed to delivery customers of the Balm Post Office. Questionnaires were also available over the counter for retail customers at the Balm Post Office. 53 questionnaires were returned. Responses regarding the proposed alternate service were as follows: 0 favorable, 28 unfavorable, and 25 expressed no opinion.

When this final determination is implemented, delivery services will be provided by the Wimauma Post Office, an EAS-18 level office. Retail and PO Box service will still be available at the Balm Post Office.

The proposal to consolidate the Balm Post Office was posted with an invitation for comment at the Balm Post Office and Wimauma Post Office from May 05, 2011 to July 06, 2011. The following additional concerns were received during the proposal posting period:

1. **Concern:** Customers expressed concern for loss of community identity
Response: The customer expressed a concern about the loss of the Communities' identity. A community's identity derives from the interest and vitality of its residents and their use of its name. The Postal Service is helping to preserve community identity by continuing the use of the suspended Post Office name and ZIP Code in addresses and in the National Five-Digit ZIP Code and Post Office Directory.
2. **Concern:** Customers expressed concern for loss of community identity
Response: The customer expressed a concern about the loss of your PO Box. A community's identity derives from the interest and vitality of its residents and their use of its name. The Postal Service is helping to preserve community identity by continuing the use of the suspended Post Office name and ZIP Code in addresses and in the National Five-Digit ZIP Code and Post Office Directory.
3. **Concern:** Customers expressed concern for those customers with disabilities who are not able to go to adminoffice Post Office to pick up their mail

Delivery Address Changed**Last Location:**

Tampa, FL, United States, Wednesday, 10/26/2011

Additional Information**Postal Service Tracking ID:**

9102901002350439589392

Shipped/Billed On:

10/21/2011

Type:

Package

Weight:

38.00 lbs

Shipment Progress[What's This?](#)

Location	Date	Local Time	Activity
Tampa, FL, United States	10/26/2011	5:37 A.M.	Postal code listed for the receiver is incorrect. UPS is attempting to obtain correct postal code and complete delivery. / The address has been corrected. The delivery has been rescheduled.
	10/26/2011	5:37 A.M.	Destination Scan
Tampa, FL, United States	10/25/2011	11:55 P.M.	Arrival Scan
Jacksonville, FL, United States	10/25/2011	7:55 P.M.	Departure Scan
	10/25/2011	1:04 P.M.	Arrival Scan
Indianapolis, IN, United States	10/22/2011	2:48 A.M.	Departure Scan
Indianapolis, IN, United States	10/21/2011	1:55 P.M.	Origin Scan
United States	10/21/2011	9:48 P.M.	Order Processed: Ready for UPS

An Example of the Carrier
changing our address from
Balm to Wimauma.

Example D